

like a leisurely breakfast, and is still more fatal to anything like family worship, when the two great ends of life seem to be money and pleasure, when husbands and wives are never so happy as when at the club, the bridge party or the theatre, and never so bored as when forced to stay at home—the difficulty of creating a wholesome moral atmosphere for children to grow up in is obviously very much increased. Yet the creation of such an atmosphere is an absolute necessity. Without it Christianity can not win out. The Christian home is the hope of the world.

The atmosphere which seems to be nothing is in fact the most subtle, all-pervasive and powerful of all influences affecting the physical health. In like manner the moral atmosphere of the home goes farther than any other force to determine the character and destiny of the children. And this atmosphere is an exhalation from the hearts and lives of the parents—the inevitable product of their character and example—whether it be the miasma of insincerity, and worldliness, and moneyworship on the one hand, or on the other the sweet, pure, sanctifying air of a reverent and happy faith in God. The apostle speaks of "the church in thy house"—the church—Kuriakon—that which is the Lord's in thy house.

#### A Personal Question.

How about your house? Have you in it that which is the Lord's? And is that the dominant influence there? Happy the children of such a house! Well has it been said that "God has no kinder gift to us than a hallowed home, the memory of lessons from the lips of father and mother, the early impressions of virtue and wisdom, the sacred streams which rise from that fountain head, and that alone, and run freshing and singing and broadening all through our lives. . . . Not without reason has a great cardinal of the Romish Church said that if he may have the children up to the age of five, he will not mind in whose hand they may be afterwards; for it is almost impossible to exaggerate the permanent effects of those first tendencies impressed upon the soul before the intellect is developed. . . . Things which we learn we can more or less unlearn, but things which are blended with the elements of our composition, made parts of us before we are conscious of our own personality, defy the hand of time and the power of conscious effort to eradicate them. . . . Let a child draw his first breath in a house which is a sanctuary; let him come to know by his quick childish perceptions that there is in his home a ladder set up from earth to heaven, and that the angels of God go up and down on it; let him feel the Divine atmosphere in his face, the air all suffused with heavenly light, the sweetness and the calm which prevail in a place where a constant communion is maintained,—and in after years he will be aware of voices which call, and hands which reach out to him from his childhood, connecting him with heaven, and even the most convincing negations of unbelief will be powerless to shake the faith which is deep as the springs of his life."

The things that a child absorbs from the home atmosphere about him in those early years of "delicate susceptibility, that season when the surface of life is porous to the Highest," are the things

that abide with him and make him what he is to be.

#### The Father

In the making of that atmosphere the father is a large factor. To a little child this father is the greatest man in the world, the fountain of all wisdom, the source of all authority, the wielder of all power—to the child he stands in the place of God. What an opportunity and responsibility are his! Yet how many fathers neglect their privilege and shirk their duty and throw the whole burden on the mother! An eminent business man of New York recently said that if he had his life to live over again, he would perhaps make less money, but he would spend more time at home with his sons, so that the relations between them might be more intimate and that he might teach them as none others can, the great issues of character.

#### The Mother.

But important as is the father's contribution to the atmosphere of the home, the mother's contribution is greater still. It is not merely an alliterative epigram when we say "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." It is a fact. The development of the affections in children precedes that of the intellect. The mother governs through the affections, and as she alone is brought into the closest relations with the children during the formative period of their lives they learn to love her with a far different feeling from that which is inspired by the father. His is largely the rule of authority or force. Hers is the rule of love, and retina indeed, if we did not give it our ing. Aye, more abiding, for it lasts and lasts and lasts long after her gentle spirit has passed into the better land.

#### Specific Instruction.

So much for the atmosphere of the home and the example of father and mother—the influences by which the ideals are fixed, the character set, the trend of the life determined, the habit of virtue formed, and the love of righteousness rendered instinctive, so that even when there is no time for reflection the child decides for the right—and when the perilous period of adolescence is reached and new desires are born and new temptations assail, the truth and purity inhaled in that Christian home still hold the youth to virtue's path.

But, in addition to this, specific instruction is required, definite teaching must be given. For, after a while "the understanding will begin to assert itself; the desire to question, to criticize, to prove, will awake. And then, unless the truths of the heart have been applied to the conscience in such a way as to satisfy the reason, there may come the desolate time in which, while the habits of practical life remain pure, and the unconscious influence of early training continues to be effective, the mind is shaken by doubt, and the hope of the soul is shrouded in a murky cloud."

Now, how is this definite teaching which will steady the mind and satisfy the intellect of the man as well as the heart of the child—to be given?

The pulpit has a duty here. Our church is pre-eminently a teaching church. It has always exalted the sermon as a part of public worship because it recognizes the reasonableness of faith and the value of truth clearly apprehended and firmly grasped for the permanent control of the life. But the spe-

cific duty of the pulpit in regard to the matter before us, as we shall presently see more fully, is to stimulate and guide and help the parents in the teaching of religion in the home.

The Sunday School also has a duty here, and we should be blind, and recalcitrant indeed if we did not give it our constant and careful oversight and our constant and cordial support. But let us remember that the Sunday School was designed to be a supplement to home training, and not a substitute for it. As no preacher can ever take the father's place, so no Sunday School teacher can ever take the mother's place. "The natural and the appointed place for children to make the acquaintance of God is their own home. The most powerful and persuasive lips for declaring the awful sanctities of religion are the priestly lips of the ordained parent." To the parent God has given the psychological opportunity when revealed truth can best be taught and spiritual guidance can best be given. Those early years of spiritual receptiveness and special susceptibility to educating efforts—that long minority of the child under the father's roof—these constitute the supreme opportunity which God has given to the parent and to the parent alone. The Sunday School, valuable as it is in a supplementary way, can not do the work of the home, because, as has been said, it does not get the child early enough, and because when it does get him, it is not able to repeat its impressions with sufficient frequency.

The home then is the decisive factor in the problem of religious education. It is interesting to note that some of the voluntary movements which are so characteristic of our time have recognized this and are endeavoring to aid the church in rousing parents to a sense of their duty. The platform of one of these organizations runs thus:

"For upbuilding individual faith, for developing the home as an ally of the Church and for strengthening the Church in the midst of world-wide missionary responsibilities and activities, the World's Morning Watch urges a policy of systematic religious instruction of the young in the home by the parents seven days in the week."

Why is it that with all our increase of activity in Sunday School work and all our improvement in Sunday School methods, the children know so much less of the Bible than those of fifty years ago? The time was when nearly every child in a Presbyterian home, by the memorizing of the great capital passages of Scripture, made them an everlasting and priceless possession: The Ten Commandments, the 1st Psalm; and the 8th, and the 19th, and the 23rd, and the 27th, and the 91st, and the 103rd, and the 121st, the 53rd chapter of Isaiah and the 55th, the Sermon on the Mount, the 15th of Luke, the 14th of John, the 13th of 1st Corinthians—the time was when the children knew these—and knew also that marvelous compendium of Biblical doctrine, the Shorter Catechism, to which even John Morley ascribes the intellectual pre-eminence of the Scottish peasantry and "about which there is so much ignorant ribaldry abroad today."

Do the children of our time know them?

Is it so now? If not, what is the rea-

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